The 11th Hour warns of disasters to come

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Body

- The 11th Hour. Directed by Nadia Conners and Leila Conners Peterson. Narrated by Leonardo DiCaprio.Rating: 6 (out of 10)

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It's a big faux pas to go into an environmental film carrying a beverage in a disposable paper cup.

It's not like I didn't know I was being environmentally ambivalent before I viewed The 11th Hour, a documentary about how society's waste and greed has pushed our planet to the brink of self-destruction. It's just that whenever I do cart travel mugs around with me, they invariably end up rolling around my car for weeks, with an old teabag inside.

Director sisters Nadia Conners and Leila Conners Peterson challenge such lame excuses head-on with a deliberately urgent and emotionally charged film, filled to bursting with expert opinion on why the earth is in such a sorry state.

Broader in scope than An Inconvenient Truth, the more tightly packaged Al Gore global-warming flick to which it is inevitably compared, The 11th Hour has its finger pressed more firmly on the panic button. The directors set the tone right away, with newsreel footage of environmental, planetary and humanitarian disasters of every sort.

Only wackos descended from the flat-earth believers of yore could fail to connect the dots in these isolated news reports of record-breaking tornadoes, drought, flooding and fires. The earth is critically ill, and it's up to us to help with the healing.

An impressive parade of experts in the fields of economics, climate change, spirituality, and ecoliteracy, among many others, weighs in on how the world's ballooning population and over-consumption of resources is sucking the earth's lifeblood dry.

On the global warming front, a few degrees is all that separates us from cataclysmic change. The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina was just a prologue of disasters to come. In the sea and on land, the population of almost every species is in decline. And as Faithkeeper Oren Lyons points out, "The earth has all the time in the world, and we don't."

Our relationship with nature is almost nonexistent. Humans used to live by the sun and rest accordingly: now we thrive on artificial light and air that extends human activity to 24/7. "In focusing on economics, we've forgotten ancient truths about our relationship with nature," says David Suzuki. We work solely to buy more goods and return to work so we can pay them off.

We are at a critical juncture, at what local Forest Ethics director Tzeporah Berman calls "the tipping point in environmental consciousness." So is it a burden or a tremendous opportunity to be part of the generation who can -- and must -- turn things around?

The 11th Hour can be considered essential, but not necessarily enjoyable, viewing. Graphics help with some of the barrage of statistics in the film, but even still, information overload occurs fairly early on. A manic soundtrack accompanies the doomsday scenarios, elevating the tension further.

There are a few tear-jerk moments towards the end of the film, as well as reassurances that the planet won't really blow up tomorrow. These are designed to bring the optimism back, but it may come too late for those viewers who have already tuned out. Producer Leonardo DiCaprio's earnest narration anchors the film in the present, in between flashbacks to policies of the past and future projections.

So write your local businesses suggesting environmental options, take baby steps or great strides when it comes to reducing your footprint on the planet, and pay attention to environmental issues at voting time. As one speaker points out, we vote every day: every time we lay down the magic plastic and make an earth-friendly purchase we make our opinions known.

If The 11th Hour has you feeling overwhelmed, its website (www.wip.warnerbros.com/11thhour) offers some easily attainable, everyday suggestions.

It can be something as small as shunning the lazy route of disposable plates and napkins for your backyard barbecue soiree. Or for that matter, bringing your tea to work in a travel mug.

Graphic

Photo: Photo submitted; Producer Leonardo DiCaprio's narration anchors The 11th Hour, which should be considered essential, but not necessarily enjoyable, viewing. ;

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